

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Case Files: AA-61302, AA-61582, AA-78217
AK-040-01-EA-020

Applicant: Chilkat Guide Service
Bart Henderson

Alaska Cross Country Guiding and Glacier Valley Tours, LLC
Al Gilliam

Fossman Guiding and Outfitting
Steve Fossman

Type of
Action: Special Recreation Permits (commercial hunting & adventure guiding)

Location: The Proposed Action affects the BLM-administered lands within Guide Outfitter Areas 01-01, 01-02 and 01-03 near Haines, Alaska. See the associated maps in each case file containing locations of all base and spike camps and general use areas for the applicants.

Prepared
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I. INTRODUCTION

This Proposed Action involves commercial guiding use of public lands near Haines, Alaska. Although all of this land has been selected for conveyance by the State of Alaska, BLM is responsible for management until the land is conveyed. Along navigable streams, BLM maintains management authority only for those lands which are above the ordinary high water mark, and the State of Alaska manages land and waters below that mark. For commercial big game hunting guides, authorization will be only for those lands that the operator is authorized to hunt on by the Big Game Commercial Services Board.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The Anchorage Field Office (AFO) has received three applications for commercial recreation use of BLM administered lands near Haines within State Guide-Outfitter areas 01-01, 01-02, and 01-03. The applicants have requested authorization to conduct guided big game hunts, rafting, air boat tours and back country adventures.

The type of service is needed to meet the anticipated public demand for quality guided services which provide safe recreation opportunities in remote or relatively inaccessible locations near Haines, Alaska. These are the only companies providing such services on BLM administered lands in this area. This proposed service will meet anticipated public demand for quality guided recreation in this area.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

The BLM has not developed a land use plan for the public lands in the Haines area. However, this environmental analysis assesses the impacts of the Proposed Action and provides a basis for a decision on the proposal (43 CFR 1610.8(b)(1)).

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

A special recreation permit (SRP) is required for commercial recreation use on public land and water pursuant to 43 CFR 8372 and Handbook H-8372-1. With this regulation, an applicant may be authorized to conduct commercial recreation activities on BLM administered land. The Authorized Officer may issue SRPs for up to five years subject to annual re-authorization. The permittee must satisfactorily meet the requirements associated with the previous years SRP as well as conform with applicable laws and regulations on all other Federal or State administered lands and waters.

Permits from the State of Alaska are required for all services that derive revenue on State lands starting from the first day of occupancy. The applicants have a State of Alaska Guide-Outfitter license to guide in Areas 01-01, 01-02, and 01-03. (See associated maps in each case file.)

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The applicants propose to conduct commercial guiding and tour operations on public land in the Haines area. The operation of the individual applicants is described below. Chilkat Guide Service and Alaska Cross Country Guiding (ACCG) and Glacier Valley Tours were first issued five year permits in 1989. The majority of the initial permitted use included BLM administered land and waters in the Takhin, Tsirku, Upper Chilkat, Takini, Ferebee, and the Nataga/Kelsall river valleys. Fossman Guiding and Outfitting was first permitted by BLM in 1996. His use includes the same river valleys and drainages as ACCG and Chilkat Guides.

The below Proposed Action will be subject to specific Stipulations and Conditions developed for the area and the standard SRP stipulations.

Chilkat Guide Service

Chilkat Guides has been operating in the Tsirku River drainage area since the early 1980's. Bart Henderson is the owner and operator of this company. The original permit (AA-61302) for his operation included use of a base camp located at the foot of DeBlondeau glacier. (DeBlondeau Glacier is mis-spelled on all USGS topographic maps as LeBlondeau.) Presently, this camp area is primarily used by ACCG, who maintain a lease site and base camp. Access to this site is by helicopter or by bush plane.

Chilkat Guide Service offers primarily fly-in, float out tours, but offer a variety of guided trips in this area based on clients' desires. These tours include basic trekking (winter and summer) and mountaineering, including glacier travel. With the exception of winter tours, they float out by raft the Tsirku River to the Haines Highway.

Camps for hiking and mountaineering trips and away from the DeBlondeau Glacier area base camp utilize tents. Trekkers will camp at different locations depending upon the area the trip goes to, the ability of and speed of the clients, weather, etc. No camps will be set up in advance or left for any period of time. This company, which provides a wilderness experience to its clients, strongly encourages minimum impact camping to insure quality trips in the future. Group size for these treks will be from two to four people per trip. Mr. Henderson expects no more than ten hiking trips for the summer season.

Seasonal average number of user days over the first eight years has been 21 user days. Over the last five years, the average has dropped to approximately 12 user days with a maximum of 35 clients for one season. He expects to make no more than ten trips into the DeBlondeau airstrip per summer season, for a total of no more than 30 clients. Although permitted in 1996 to perform winter trekking and skiing opportunities, no activities have taken place. Currently no winter treks are scheduled. Winter treks would utilize the same use area as the summer trips.

Chilkat Guide Service was also permitted in 1996 for summer fly-in hiking adventures in the Ferebee Glacier area. To date, no trips have been carried out in this area, but Chilkat Guides is still interested in providing this experience. The estimated number of clients into this drainage would be 50 per season. No other hiking trips are known to occur in this drainage. Within the Ferebee Glacier area, clients will be flown to the foot of the glacier (Section 18, T. 28 S., R. 58 E. (State land)) and camp for the night. The following four to nine days will be spent trekking the surrounding areas of the glacier. Temporary tent camps (two to four person tents) will be used and all human waste will be carried out. Chilkat Guides are aware of the commercial helicopter use in this area.

Alaska Cross Country Guiding and Glacier Valley Tours

Albert Gilliam, originally received a SRP in August of 1987 (AA-61582) for his guiding activities which included fly-in/raft out tours and guided big game hunting. This use is in conjunction with Mr. Gilliam's BLM one acre cabin lease site (AA-44380), located at the foot of DeBlondeau Glacier in T. 30 S., R. 54-55 E., Section 18, CRM. Mr. Gilliam's guiding activities on BLM administered land include the land and related waters of the Takhin, Tsirku, Upper Chilkat, Takini, and the uplands of the Nataga/Kelsall river valleys.

The original EA for Mr. Gilliam (EA-040-8019, dated 5/31/88) estimated his maximum user days (fly-in/raft out) at 120 user days (40 clients at three days each). Use data collected from 1988 through 1995 indicated that Mr. Gilliam averaged less than 30 user days. The second EA (EA-AK-040-96-020) examined the same use, but Mr. Gilliam felt that he needed approximately 60 user days (20 clients at three days each). Post use reports indicate that from 1996 through 2000 he averaged 32 user days per year for his fly-in/raft out trip. For this trip, clients are flown or boated to the glacier camp and float out on the Tsirku River. Use season for this trip was between July 1st and Labor Day.

Starting in 2001 Mr. Gilliam has secured a contract with Norwegian Cruise Lines to operate boating/hiking tours. Operations will begin on private land near Nugget Creek where clients will be dropped off by aircraft from Haines or Skagway. Mr. Gilliam will then transport them by air boat up the Tsirku River to his BLM lease site at the base of the DeBlondeau Glacier for a one to two hour hiking exploration of the area. Hiking will be confined to the rocky glacial moraine of the DeBlondeau Glacier. He will then return clients back to Nugget Creek for gold panning, lunch and eventual departure back to Haines. Total tour time is four hours. Air boat operation between Nugget Creek and the DeBlondeau Glacier camp is approximately two miles or ten minutes. Refueling for the air boat will be done at Mr. Gilliam's private property near Klukwan.

With an operation season from approximately May through September (150 days), estimated user days for the next five years are as follows:

2001 - 500 user days @ 4 clients per day
2002 - 1,000 user days @ 7 clients per day
2003 - 2,500 user days @ 17 clients per day
2004 - 5,000 user days @ 33 clients per day
2005 - 10,000 user days @ 65 clients per day

Mr. Gilliam also plans on providing big game hunting opportunities as he has done since 1990 on BLM administered lands in Guide Outfitter Areas 01-01, 01-02, and 01-03. These include guided ten day black and brown bear hunts (spring and fall) as well as seven day goat hunts (fall). He plans on a maximum of twelve bear and seven goat clients. Over the last five years Mr. Gilliam has averaged two brown bear hunters and two goat hunters per year.

Mr. Gilliam will continue utilizing his DeBlondeau Glacier camp (T. 30 S., R. 54-55 E., Section 18, CRM) for his base of operations. However, he owns land at Mile 26 of the Haines Highway and is presently constructing several guest cabins. Most of his future operations associated with his hunting activities will be based from this location. He uses his air boat, or a chartered aircraft to access his glacier camp and other hunting areas. Hunts away from the DeBlondeau Glacier camp utilize two to four man temporary tents. All exploring and hunting is done by foot or canoe. No OHV's are used.

Fossman Guiding and Outfitting

Mr. Fossman has applied for a SRP (AA-78217) to conduct guided mountain goat, brown and black bear hunts within Guide Outfitter Areas 01-01, 01-02, and 01-03. His primary use area would be the Tsirku, Takhin, Klehini, Chilkat and Chilkoot River drainages. Post use reports from 1996 through 2000 indicate that he has less than ten

user days per year on BLM administered lands. Most years he hunts primarily on State of Alaska lands.

He estimates that he will continue to guide between two and four goat hunters each fall. The goat season is generally between August 1st and December 31st. Access is predominantly by boat, however, some areas have highway access. In either case, a substantial amount of backpacking is required in order to get to the hunting areas.

Black and brown bear hunts take place both in the spring and fall. He estimates taking two hunters during each season for a total of four during the year. General hunting season for bear is from April 15th to June 15th and September 15th through November 30th. Access is by boat and 4WD truck, and then hiking to hunting areas.

Facilities include temporary tent camps only. Locations will vary depending upon where the game is located. Camps will not be set up in advance and will be removed upon departure. Hunting parties will be completely self-sufficient.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would be to continue present management and not to allow commercial guiding and outfitting on these BLM administered lands.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

All of the land described in the Proposed Action has been selected by the State of Alaska as part of its entitlement at statehood. BLM is responsible for management of the land until it is conveyed to the State or the selection is relinquished. Adjacent landowners (State of Alaska) have been made aware of the applications and no responses have been received.

A. Critical Elements:

It has been determined that the following Critical Elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative:

Air Quality

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)

Cultural/Paleontological Resources

Environmental Justice

Farm Lands (Prime or Unique)

Flood Plains

Invasive, Non-native Plant Species

Native American Religious Concerns

Subsistence

Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species
Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)
Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
Wetlands/Riparian
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

B. Wildlife:

For specific discussion on the affected environment for wildlife see EA-AK-040-95-015, (p.3-16-18, E.4 a-e). This discusses the wildlife habitat within the areas of operation.

C. Socio-economics:

The town of Haines, Alaska has a seasonal but growing tourism based economy. Retail shops, restaurants, hotels, transportation and tours generate substantial income for the business community and sales tax revenues for the city during the summer months. Active tourism businesses support other sectors of the community through spin-off purchases.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Wildlife:

The impacts to wildlife are habitat damage by vegetative destruction or modification by human uses at or around camp sites and wildlife displacement from air boat use on the Takine river. Hiking tours around the DeBlondeau Glacier pose little impact as terrain consists of gravel sized and larger rocks over the entire glacial moraine. There is a potential for creating "camp bear" problems through unclean campsites. However, previous camp inspections indicate that operators have kept clean camps and have not had any "camp bear" problems to date. Access to remote sites by aircraft may pose short term noise impacts to recreational users in the immediate area.

2. Recreation:

Increased use of air boats along the Tsirku River by ACCG will be noticeable to other river users both visually and by increased noise levels. The quality of the wilderness experience will decrease, particularly for recreation users that have experienced the area previously.

3. Socio-Economic Impacts:

The Proposed Action will help the local economy by bringing tourism dollars into the Haines area. Some benefit to local government is expected from tax dollars.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative may reduce the potential positive socio-economic impacts since fewer tourism and recreation dollars would come into the community. There is also a potential loss of recreation opportunities for people desiring access to areas that are otherwise inaccessible to them.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

Because the applicants' actions on public lands are increasing in numbers (specifically for ACCG) over the next five years, it is expected the Proposed Action will add to the visual and noise disturbances to recreational users and wildlife in the area. Most noise will be due to increased air boat traffic up the Tsirku River along with other development and increased use of recreation resources in the Haines area. This use may decrease the quality of the recreational experience slightly.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Persons and Agencies Consulted:

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B. List of Preparers:

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